DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 269 FL 022 003

AUTHOR Schneider, Carol
TITLE A Teacher's Guide to Choosing a Secondary Foreign Language Textbook.
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS High Schools; *Language Teachers; Participative Decision Making; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Programs; *Teacher Role; *Textbook Evaluation; *Textbook Selection

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses steps that high school foreign language teachers can take to select appropriate textbooks for their classes. Teachers should: (1) determine their department's philosophy; (2) look at their students' needs; (3) ask department members for suggestions; (4) review school district guidelines; (5) examine as many textbooks as possible; (6) contact sales representative for sample textbooks, materials, and presentations; (7) examine the current textbook in use; (8) examine and compare textbooks; (9) teach sample lessons from various texts; (10) find out what other school districts are using; (11) talk to colleagues; (12) observe classes being taught with various texts; (13) discuss possible choices; (14) involve students in the process; and (15) make a selection. (Contains 4 references.) (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 269

A Teacher's Guide to Choosing a Secondary Foreign Language Textbook

by Carol Schneider

Assemble a group of high school foreign language teachers and within minutes, the question will be asked: "What textbook are you using?" The question is a good one. It is probably safe to say that the average teacher will use the textbook for at least seven years. By the end of three years, s/he has practically memorized entire sections of the book; and by the seventh year, the teacher is so desperate for a new book that it is most tempting to make a hasty decision.

Choosing the right textbook is important for several reasons. First, it is the students' primary reference. The book's content should be of high interest to adolescents. It should tempt students with high quality visuals and encourage independent home study by providing clear explanations.

Secondly, the text will most probably determine the sequencing and amount of material to be presented. Different teachers teaching the same level need to cover the same amount of material so that their students have approximately the same knowledge base and abilities as they enter the next level.

Finally, the book should be a timesaver for the teacher. Both the

FL022803

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Carol Schneider

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

book and its ancillaries should make the teacher's life much easier by providing a variety of activities and approaches. The teacher should not have to pour a great deal of energy into supplementing, changing, or rearranging the book. Few of us have the creativity, the expertise, or the time to create our own book: we have to rely on authors and editors.

Textbook choice has not always been as difficult as it is today. Indeed, some of us in the profession remember when ALM was a great breakthrough. In the sixties and seventies, there simply weren't a lot of books to choose from. The decade of the eighties, however, changed our profession. The impact of the landmark *Proficiency Guidelines* was felt far and wide, with the result that foreign language enrollments climbed. Teachers needed materials that reflected the new emphasis on oral proficiency and new research findings.

The renaissance in foreign language instruction has produced a panoply of exciting materials which include items the ALM teacher never knew to dream of: CD-ROM, complete video packages, and testing and assessment programs. These ancillaries, while vital to modern methodology, complicate the matter of textbook choice. How do teachers look beyond attractive packaging, dazzling computer programs, and oral proficiency jargon to choose the text that is appropriate for them and for

their students? In this article, I will suggest a sequence of steps that can be taken that will lead you in the right direction.

Step 1: Determine your department's philosophy.

The importance of this first step cannot be overemphasized. Teachers must be able to articulate their basic beliefs concerning foreign language education. What are your goals? What do you feel is important? What direction do you want to take during the next 7 to 10 years?

Step 2: Look at your students and their needs.

Many factors will come into play: have they had FLES experience? What are their ages? How do you intend to keep students interested? What is their cultural background? Do you need to appeal to a multicultural population or spark awareness in a homogeneous group? Most importantly, what should a student who has finished the full sequence of study be able to do?

Step 3: Ask department members for suggestions.

Some teachers may have experience with other books or be interested in a particular series. Their expertise should be used. Also, determine whether your department as a whole will be involved in the search process, or whether you will use a textbook selection committee.

Step 4: Obtain a copy of your school district's guidelines.

Your principal or curriculum director will probably be able to furnish you with this document, and you need to make sure you are following district policy.

Step 5: Look at as many textbooks as you can.

The easiest way to do this is at conferences. Local, regional, and national conferences almost always include book displays. Teachers should examine all the ones available and talk to the sales representatives. Listen carefully to what they say, as they can be very helpful. If you can find four or five textbook series that appeal to your department, you're off to a good start.

Step 6: Contact sales representatives for sample textbook copies, materials, and presentations.

Having narrowed your choices from all of the textbooks on the market to four or five, you begin your research in earnest. Textbook representatives are willing to send examination materials (some of which may need to be returned once you have finished looking at them). Although not all of the sales representatives are foreign language experts, they are usually able to answer most questions. If you set up a formal presentation, make sure to plan for a time convenient for most or all teachers in the department (or

on the selection committee). A thorough presentation takes at least an hour; perhaps arranging for released time during the school day, rather than tacking a long session onto the end of the day, would be an option.

(Steps 7 through 12 will take place concurrently over a period of several months):

Step 7: Consider your current textbook.

Robison (1993) suggests this activity: discuss the book you are currently using. What do you like about the book? What are its shortcomings? Categorize, make a checklist, and develop a rating scale. Another option is to use a textbook evaluation instrument. Often included in state curriculum guides, a textbook evaluation instrument is a checklist of characteristics to look for. Whether you develop your own or use one already available, a checklist can ensure a balanced, global view of the books under consideration.

Step 8: Examine and compare textbooks.

One of the easiest ways to get an accurate idea of texts is to keep the examination copies near as you do your lesson plannning. Every time you teach a concept, look it up to see how each book treats that concept. Gradually, a clear notion of each book's "personality" will emerge.

Step 9: Teach sample lessons.

Teach sample lessons from various texts. How do your students react? Were they involved and responsive? Were you comfortable? Adair-Hauck (1993) suggests asking: Did the activities engage the learners in meaningful and authentic interaction? Did the lesson emphasize mechanical drills or truly personalized and communicative activities? Wulz (1989) argues that most textbook activities should be communicative in nature by probing the students to express their own experiences and opinions. For an excellent discussion on the importance of contextualized, personalized and communicative activities, see Shrum and Glisan (1994).

Step 10: Find out what other districts are using.

Larger school districts or very progressive districts will most likely have put a great deal of energy and thought into their textbook choice. Their students may be very different from yours, but it's still important to consider what their choice was and why.

Step 11: Talk to colleagues.

Get information from other high school teachers in your area. They will be able to tell you a book's strong points and weaknesses. University colleagues can also be a rich source of information.

Step 12: Observe classes being taught.

If possible, visit schools who are using the texts you are seriously

considering and observe teachers and students. Ask the students how they like the book.

Step 13: Discuss.

A free exchange of opinions and impressions should take place among teachers on the selection committee. Since you are still considering several series, try to keep an open mind at this point. After discussion has taken place, narrow your options to two or three.

Step 14: Involve your students in the process.

Remember, the students are the consumers. Have them look at the books you are considering and get their reactions. You have already chosen books you feel are pedagogically sound: invite the students to "judge the book by its cover."

Step 15: Discuss and decide.

Although you may not be able to arrive at 100% agreement, a consensus among department members should be reached. Keep in mind, however, that no decision is perfect.

Once you receive your materials, your textbook company should be willing to provide an inservice program. Teachers can thus be assured of using the text as it was intended to be used, and can properly and more easily implement new techniques and ideas.

Although choosing a new text is a time-consuming task, it is exciting to start anew. If you've done your homework, students will enjoy their new book, and you will be happy to use a well-planned, well-articulated text that makes teaching more enjoyable.

REFERENCES

Adair-Hauck, B. (1993). Personal communication.

Shrum, J. and Glisan, E. (1994). *Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

Robison, R. (1993). Personal communication.

Walz, J. (1989). "Context and Contextualized Language Practice in Foreign Language Teaching." *Modern Language Journal*, 73, 161-168.